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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA IMMEDIATE 1467  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE 0265  
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME IMMEDIATE 0182  
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL IMMEDIATE 0400  
RUEHPH/CDC ATLANTA GA IMMEDIATE  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA IMMEDIATE 0125

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000208

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DEPT PLEASE PASS USAID  
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ANKARA FOR AGRICULTURE COUNSELOR AND ATTACHE  
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TAGS: [EAGR](#) [EAID](#) [CASC](#) [KFLU](#) [AJ](#)  
SUBJECT: AVIAN CASES OF H5N1 CONFIRMED IN AZERBAIJAN

REF: A. A) BAKU 187 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)B. B) BAKU 189  
[1](#)C. C) 05 BAKU 1892

Classified By: DCM JASON P. HYLAND FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D)

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AVIAN CASES OF H5N1 CONFIRMED IN AZERBAIJAN

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The GOAJ announced February 10 that samples taken from birds in Azerbaijan had tested positive for H5N1 avian influenza. The tests were conducted at an international reference laboratory at Weybridge, UK. Ministers of Health and Agriculture did the right thing by quickly announcing the news to the public. Post is concerned that the GOAJ is poorly organized to deal with this news, thus hampering a rapid response. With President Ilham Aliyev in Rambouillet, France, for crucial talks on Nagorno-Karabakh, this top-down government may also be waiting for his February 12 return to set a clear course. Post is reaching out to the UN and other donors to craft a coherent message to the GOAJ and marshal needed international assistance. Post released a warden message on the H5N1 announcement to the American community and a separate message to the Embassy community on February 10. We have also reviewed our tripwires (ref C) and determined that our current response is appropriate. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) On February 10, the Ministries of Health and Agriculture issued a joint statement confirming that samples taken from large bird die-offs and sent to an international laboratory in the UK had tested positive for H5N1. This announcement came after some confusion on the part of the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) during the evening of February [1](#)9. Amidst rumors that the WHO and FAO had already received word from the lab of positive findings, the MoA maintained that it would not make a public announcement on avian influenza until it received official notification from the FAO or WHO. The Ambassador spoke by telephone to Agriculture Minister Abasov February 9 and urged the GOAJ to make an announcement quickly after following up with the UK lab directly. (NOTE: Econoff spoke directly with the Weybridge laboratory earlier on February 9 and learned that six of seven samples tested at that time were positive for H5. Of

those, at least two had been tested further and found positive for H5N1. The laboratory also indicated that it had sent two emails to Azerbaijan State Vet Service Chief Dr. Ismayil Hasanov on February 8 with the positive findings. It is not clear whether Hasanov received these emails or communicated the findings to the Minister of Agriculture. Email attachments sent to Econoff by the Weybridge lab have been forwarded to EUR/CACEN. END NOTE.)

13. (SBU) Following the GOAJ announcement February 10, a World Health Organization (WHO) assessment team briefed the international community on its two-week examination of Azerbaijan's human health and veterinary system. The team's report was decidedly negative vis-a-vis the GOAJ's lab and operational capabilities and training. However, the team provided a number of recommendations, most medium to long term, in various areas (septel). During the brief, UNICEF country director Hanaa Singer, who has been coordinating the UN system response to AI in Azerbaijan, detailed a meeting with Deputy Prime Minister Abbas Abbasov earlier February 10.

She described the meeting as "brutal" and said that Abbasov railed against the Health Ministry and international community, which he believed was conspiring against Azerbaijan. In her view, he had all but refused to acknowledge the presence of avian influenza in the country and only reluctantly allowed an FAO expert to proceed with plans to gather new samples for testing.

14. (C) Singer's report adds to Post's growing concern that, while the Ministers of Agriculture and Health are clearly ready to engage, elements within the GOAJ are mismanaging the response to this incipient crisis. The State Veterinary Service Chief has long been an obstacle, particularly in getting samples properly tested at a reference laboratory.

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However, DPM Abbasov's intransigence has created a significant barrier to the international community's ability to providing Azerbaijan with needed aid and technical assistance. Post is planning to raise quietly with other senior GOAJ officials the need to designate another official, such as DPM Abid Sharifov, more able to manage the GOAJ AI response effectively. Ambassador will also urge newly appointed Minister of Emergency Situations Kemalladin Heydarov to play a role in crafting the GOAJ response. With President Ilham Aliyev in Rambouillet, France, for crucial Nagorno-Karabakh talks, this top-down government may also be waiting for his February 12 return to get its marching orders.

15. (SBU) Post is renewing our outreach to the international community, particularly the UN, in order to urge they take a lead role. Ambassador called UNDP Resident Coordinator Marco Borsotti February 10 to elicit his personal involvement with the GOAJ. Post has also suggested that FAO, which covers Azerbaijan from Ankara, send additional experts to augment the one FAO expert already here and provide capability for field-level assistance to the GOAJ.

16. (SBU) Following the GOAJ's announcement concerning positive AI results, Post sent out a cleared warden message and immediately distributed it to the American community, and sent a separate message to the Embassy community. We already held an AI town hall meeting on February 2 (ref B), but plan to hold a second town hall meeting for the community next week to answer any additional questions. In addition, Post has reviewed the tripwires set forth in reftel B and determined that we are meeting those requirements. Post has also determined that the other tripwires in reftel B are still appropriate.

HARNISH